

A VALUE-CREATING APPROACH

Dialogues with the Advisory Board: Interview with Namrata Sharma

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Abstract

Namrata Sharma is adjunct professor at the State University of New York. She is also an expert advisor to the United Nations Harmony with Nature Knowledge Network. Her research focuses on Global Citizenship Education discourse and practice and Education for Sustainable Development within UNESCO-led initiatives. Her work has focused on India, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States. In these contexts, she is concerned with the impact of the political climate on young people's values, young people's perceptions of global citizenship and the role of institutions in shaping students' values and sense of belonging. Outcomes of her research have included the development and teaching of various courses (such as EDU 114 - Comparative and International Education: Non-Western Perspectives at SUNY Oswego).

Keywords: value-creating approach, Non-western perspective, GCE

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1. Educational and personal biography

Please see the [link to the biography](#).

In addition, she is a member of the [scientific committee](#) of the UNESCO Chair in Global Citizenship Education (GCE) in Higher Education assigned to the University of Bologna.

2. Professor, could you explain what you mean by GCE?

Thank you so much for this opportunity to interview for GLOCITED. I have been following the various initiatives launched by the UNESCO Global Citizenship Education in Higher Education Chair at the University of Bologna and the work being done by colleagues like yourself. I am sure these activities will be a great resource for scholars and practitioners working in the field of global education!

To respond to your question, GCE or Global Citizenship Education is an educational approach that aims to foster a sense of global awareness, understanding, and responsibility among learners so that they can actively participate as global citizens in an interconnected world. There has also been an increased focus within this initiative to foster critical thinking and a sense of social justice. This approach is being used across formal, non-formal and informal learning experiences.

My work engages with the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) led initiative of Global Citizenship Education (GCED or GCE). To provide some context, the urgent concerns for education in the twenty-first century include climate change, migrations due to strife or climate conditions, and the politics of narrow nationalism. As a response to some of these issues, in September 2015, the United Nations (UN) adopted 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with active participation by UNESCO. Of these 17 goals, Goal 4, namely target 4.7 addresses Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and related approaches such as GCE.

I think it's important to raise the question you have posed and to examine what is our respective definition of GCE? One of the reasons for this is that as recent scholarly work suggests, depending on what definition of *global citizenship* we adopt, the definitions and models of Global Citizenship *Education* and its focus on its goals in terms of student outcomes will change (Yemini, 2017). And so, rather than assuming that there is a standard definition of global citizenship, I think it's crucial to reflect on what definition we choose to use in the process of implementing both GCE as well as ESD. In my work I use a value-creating approach to examine these initiatives, and we can discuss this in our conversation today.

3. About the GCE definition you say that we need to ask ourselves this question. Do you think that the various approaches, as well as the way we teach, can dialogue with each other?

You raise an important point. Exploring diverse perspectives can enhance intercultural understandings. There must also be a framework for discussions in engaging with worldwide examples of values-based perspectives on GCE. For example, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1948 enshrines the rights and freedoms of all human beings and is an important global framework to use for GCE.

4. As you have mentioned in your work, biographies can be inspiring and engage others. So, could you tell us what was your first approach with GCE and why?

Thank you for asking! Let me share some specific influences and experiences that moved me in this direction.

When my father was around 8 years old, he and his family became refugees during the partition of India in 1947. My father studied under streetlights, often stuffing his school textbooks into his shirt while commuting on a bicycle to his local school in the chilly winter, and yet he managed to create happy memories of his childhood. Their family of six had regular visitors in their tiny basement room as the community supported each other to get out of poverty. During this period, one day my grandfather brought home a globe, having skipped a few meals to buy it, and showed this globe to his children to give them a sense, I suppose, of the wider world.

By the time I was growing up in the 1980s and 1990s in India, my sisters and I had heard of this episode many times and like most kids we were happy to escape listening to our parents' often-repeated stories, finding pleasure instead in being immersed in American pop songs and other Western culture. We were now part of the Indian middle-class. English was our first language and in school the curriculum continued to be designed as in the colonial times to give students a Western experience in education. For example, we studied more from the works of Shakespeare and other British literary figures than that from local yet well-regarded poets such as Rabindranath Tagore. Later in my career, especially since I have been working in the field of global citizenship education in Japan, UK, and the US, some critical reflections from my own experiences as a youth makes me ponder deeply on the question of who can be considered as a

global citizen? Is it someone who speaks English and has knowledge of the wider world, or could it be someone who though might not have travelled abroad, genuinely perceive themselves as citizens of this world? For example, my grandfather, who bought a globe for his kids even during his days in poverty to give his children a vision and connection to the wider world. I think we can agree that the sense of connection to other people and living beings is a prerequisite to being and becoming a global citizen.

5. Given your university involvement and your books, could you refer to experiences and projects that represent possible GCE teaching?

In my published work I make recommendations for the UNESCO-led initiatives of ESD and GCE. I also include these topics within my taught courses at the State University of New York. The courses are titled “Comparative and International Education: non-Western perspectives.” Throughout the semester students study the idea of global citizenship from a worldwide selection of diverse paradigms and perspectives, reflecting on various understandings of this term across varied cultures and contexts. Students also discuss what global citizenship means to them and whether they consider themselves to be a global citizen.

I am always amazed by their responses and the sense of connection they feel to the wider world, and importantly for their sense of social justice and commitment to addressing issues of equity and equality through learning and taking action within our university and community. I am sure there are several such examples across formal, non-formal and informal learning spaces worldwide that are being used to raise awareness among youth and to help prepare them to tackle the several challenges facing humanity, and how they can take action as individuals and also collectively.

6. The challenges facing our societies at this time in history require immediate actions that have an effect going forward. In your opinion, what are the main difficulties and limitations that the approach you describe faces in making an impact on such large-scale challenges? And what, on the other hand, are the elements that can help address the historical challenges of our societies?

There are certainly several challenges facing our societies and the worldwide action backing the SDGs is a response to some of these challenges as mentioned earlier. At the same time, the SDGs have also come under criticism. For example, the discourse

around Goal 4 on quality education, and in particular target 4.7 that addresses GCE suggests Western-dominated agendas and an underlying Western worldview. However, in spite of its current predicament, I think GCE provides a discursive space that can allow a genuine intercultural understanding of particularities and specificities where universal assumptions are being made within education globally.

To explain, within education worldwide there is a heavy influence of Western paradigms and perspectives. In this context the field of GCE provides a timely opportunity for scholars to bring into the discourse non-Western and less widely known perspectives. Through my own publications and teaching within this field I aim to highlight alternative paradigms and diverse perspectives from a selection of worldwide examples. It is imperative that the practice of ESD and GCE bring into focus alternative ways of thinking, being, acting, and living that have informed various groups of people and led to the development of sustainable communities worldwide. For example, the impact of people's Indigenous knowledge on creating more sustainable communities. Such communities regard the Rights of Nature and Species to be sacred, and also increasingly we are seeing across the world constitutional rights being given to trees, rivers, and wildlife. The UN forum Harmony with Nature Knowledge Network that I am associated with, is one such group that promotes Earth Jurisprudence and the Rights of Nature.

Overall, there is a lack of ethical and values-based perspectives in GCE. A recent UNESCO report finds that across nation states sustainability issues are less often reflected in curricula and teacher education than other themes. Further, where there are instances of ESD and GCE being integrated into the curriculum, the study finds that the related assessments are more to do with testing knowledge and skills rather than values, attitudes, and ethical behaviors (UNESCO, 2022).

In responding to these issues, I engage with a values-based approach for GCE. In particular, I use the concept of Soka or value creation as a lens to examine the UNESCO-led initiative of GCE. Soka or value-creating education is an approach to curriculum that developed in the twentieth century in Japan. As described by the Soka progenitor, Dr. Daisaku Ikeda, Soka or value creation is "the capacity to find meaning, to enhance one's own existence and contribute to the well-being of others, under any circumstance" (Ikeda, 2021: 6). Soka or value-creating education is a learner-centered approach that is focused on the health, well-being, and happiness of each student. The

concept of happiness here is described as the ability to lead a contributive life, for the welfare of self and others.

And so, I use a value-creating approach to engage with ESD and GCE. I propose value-creating global citizenship education as a pedagogical approach that advances learning for sustainability based on an integrated view of life (Sharma, 2020). References to other diverse forms of knowledge in my work include Ubuntu and Buen Vivir that have emerged from sub-Saharan Africa and South America, respectively. Other values-based and integrated perspectives include the Earth Charter. These paradigms and initiatives are based on notions of interdependencies that can help combat the onslaught of neoliberal capitalism and the promotion of individualism. One of the questions for us working in the field of GCE as scholars and practitioners is to ask whether we expand the current focus from individual empowerment to enable learners to take bold, collective actions?

7. From your words emerge themes of particular interest that are also expressed in the publications indicated on the chair's website, with respect to these, what is the common thread and how has it evolved over time?

The UNESCO Chair, Prof. Massimiliano Tarozzi's work has influenced my scholarly studies in the field of intercultural education, on issues related to social justice, and the need for values-based perspectives in GCE (Tarozzi and Torres, 2016). I would like to mention here the Global Education and Learning or GEL database as one of Prof. Tarozzi's key initiatives that will be helpful for practitioners and scholars like myself working in related fields. I look forward to continuing collaborating on various ongoing educational efforts and am delighted to be included on the scientific committee led by the UNESCO Chair at the University of Bologna.

8. Are there any new publications that we have not indicated or works in progress and if so, can you briefly indicate what they represent in your course of study?

In my newer work, including a journal article published recently (Sharma, 2023), I am interested in moving forward the discourse on GCE and exploring the following two key issues. The first is bringing together thematic topics associated with ESD and GCE that are often taught in silos (Sharma, 2020: 46). Second, the relevance of GCE for non-

formal education which is lacking in scholarly literature in the field. Much of the scholarly work addresses formal education whereas in several parts of the world GCE initiatives have been driven largely through the work of civil society organizations (CSOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Prof. Tarozzi's (2020) study on this topic makes an important contribution. One of the outcomes of his study is the importance of the role of CSOs, NGOs, and grassroots social movements that can help bring critical voices of the people into the global political arena.

Adding to this, future studies of social movements can help bring together discussions related to GCE and ESD. For example, the global youth-led campaigns around climate change. Such studies can explore how youth globally are coming together as citizens of this world to work on sustainability issues.

In my studies on the relevance of grassroots movements for GCE, I take the examples of Wangari Maathai and the Green Belt Revolution in Kenya; Mahatma Gandhi and the *satyagraha* movement in India; and the worldwide Soka movement. In these examples people were held together based on their beliefs and notions of interdependence. Such holistic frameworks also challenge the binary relationship between humans, Nature, and all Species. A study of these alternative frameworks can help make more explicit links between the topics of social justice and earth justice.

There are also policy implications, for example, sustainability policies can combine environmental goals with aims that address social issues, such as the disproportionate impact of (un)sustainability on marginalized groups and communities worldwide. I look forward to our continued conversations as I explore these themes in my ongoing work.

Thank you!

Thank you very much for your involvement in Glocited and for these valuable reflections!

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